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Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on reforming the Field Service category of personnel in United Nations peace operations

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on reforming the Field Service category of personnel in United Nations peace operations (JIU/REP/2001/6).

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Reforming the Field Service Category of Personnel in United Nations Peace Operations

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Joint Inspection Unit

Geneva, 2002

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ACRONYMS

CAO	Chief Administrative Officer
DPKO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations
FALD	Field Administration and Logistics Division (DPKO)
FS	Field Service
FSO	Field Service Officer
FSL	Field Service Level
FSSU	Field Service Staff Union
GS	General Service
ICSC	International Civil Service Commission
JIU	Joint Inspection Unit
OHRM	Office of Human Resources Management
OIOS	Office of Internal Oversight Services
OLA	Office of Legal Affairs
PAS	Performance Appraisal System
PKO	Peacekeeping Operation
PMSS	Personnel Management Support Service
SAL	Standard Assignment Length
UNDOF	United Nations Disengagement Observer Force
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFICYP	United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFIL	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
UNMIK	United Nations Mission in Kosovo
UNMOGIP	United Nations Military Observer Group for India and Pakistan
UNSECOORD	Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator
UNTAET	United Nations Nations Transitional Administraiton in East Timor
UNTSO	United Nations Truce Supervision Organization
WFP	World Food Programme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: OBJECTIVE, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

***Objective*: To contribute to the reform of the Field Service, in order that this category of personnel may serve more effectively and more efficiently the needs of current and future peacekeeping operations.**

A. In the last two decades, peacekeeping has established itself as a core function of the United Nations, and significant changes have occurred in peace operations that have called for wide-ranging policies and measures to be put in place to meet the rapidly evolving needs of these operations. In particular, recent reviews, including the Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, have highlighted the growing need for the Organization to rely on core teams of career specialists who can be deployed at short notice and who possess the required experience and qualifications to carry out the main administrative and logistical functions linked to the start-up, expansion and closure of field missions.

B. Therefore, the concept of a separate category of personnel composed of highly mobile field specialists, as originally envisaged when the Field Service (FS) category of personnel was established in 1949, not only remains valid but has acquired increased relevance. However, in view of the changes that have occurred over the last decades in the nature, mandates and management of peace operations, this category of personnel must be thoroughly reformed and restructured if it is to respond adequately to the challenges of the new operations.

C. In particular, there is a general consensus that the original composition of the Field Service in terms of occupational groups, qualifications and skills no longer matches the requirements of today's peace operations. General and specialized training, therefore, with an emphasis on managerial skills, will be a determining factor in ensuring the continuation of the Field Service.

Recommendation 1

The General Assembly may wish to request the Secretary-General to prepare and submit to it at its fifty-eighth session a detailed and comprehensive proposal for the future composition of the Field Service category of personnel. The review should include a clear definition of the occupational groups and numbers of individuals needed in each, as well as criteria for the identification of present staff members, either Field Service Officers (FSOs) or staff on Appointments of Limited Duration currently filling FS posts, who will be integrated into the new Field Service and those who will need to be redeployed or phased out (see paragraphs 28 to 31).

Recommendation 2

The Secretary-General should prepare a full assessment of the training needed to address the shortage of managerial, supervisory and specialized technical skills among those FSOs who will be retained.

***(a)* As a first step, the Field Administration and Logistics Division (FALD) of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) should complete urgently (by mid-2002) the inventory of skills and competencies available among FSOs, on which this needs assessment will be based;**

***(b)* Then, with the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM), it should develop a course plan, with detailed cost estimates and timeframe, which should be offered to FSOs (see paragraphs 32 to 35).**

D. While it is recognized that mobility has a price, the cost associated with the Field Service, given the present conditions of service and the level of salaries, benefits and entitlements granted to its members, appears high. This is particularly so in comparison with local sources of technical, administrative and logistical support to peacekeeping missions. Many of the

FSO's entitlements are linked to the system of "parent duty stations" and "tour of duty", as well as the designation of duty stations as "family" or "non-family".

E. Although the system of parent duty stations was meant to provide continuity to families, conditions in established missions and the lack of a clear policy for mobility and rotation which prevailed for decades have often been detrimental to the welfare of staff members and their families, as well as to the development of clear career paths for FSOs.

F. In addition, due to a high degree of centralization, as well as to the involvement of three parties (headquarters, parent duty stations and special missions) in the management of its staff members, administration of the category is particularly cumbersome and process-driven, leading to frequent delays and bottlenecks.

Recommendation 3

The concept of the parent duty station should be revisited within the context of the reform of the Field Service, in order to align the entitlements of FSOs with those of other categories of staff while continuing to reward adequately mobility and hardship. The Secretary-General should submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session a detailed cost-benefit analysis of all FSOs based at United Nations Headquarters and rotating from there (see paragraphs 38 to 45).

Recommendation 4

As a corollary to this review of the system of parent duty stations, the Secretary-General should devise and propose to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session a new policy for mobility and rotation of FSOs. In particular, in consultation with FALD, OHRM and the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator (UNSECOORD), the process for the designation of duty stations as family or non-family should be revised, taking into account:

***(a)* The need to minimize family separations and provide adequate conditions for the welfare of families;**

***(b)* Financial considerations; and**

***(c)* Practices of other United Nations organizations (see paragraphs 47 to 53, and 66 to 72).**

Recommendation 5

FSOs should be administered along the same lines as other staff members who are also recruited under the 100 series of staff rules and regulations. In particular:

***(a)* Further authority should be delegated to missions in the field to approve and process entitlements of FSOs;**

***(b)* Procedures and criteria for the recruitment and promotion of FSOs should be amended to comply with those presently applicable to General Service or Professional staff;**

***(c)* Specific efforts should be undertaken to improve the gender balance and geographical representation within the Field Service, especially in the highest grades of the category (see paragraphs 14, 15 and 54 to 62).**

These measures should be taken immediately by the Secretary-General, not-withstanding the results of the reviews suggested in recommendations 1, 2, 3 and 4 above.

G. It is also widely acknowledged that the strain of field service life has taken a serious toll on the mental and physical health of many FSOs and their general well-being, and that the Organization has failed to assist them adequately in these personal trials. Other United Nations organizations dealing with emergency situations and with a large civilian presence on the ground, such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)and the World Food Programme (WFP), have developed a number of policies and mechanisms to address this and other issues linked to the deployment of their staff to the field. Keeping in mind the specificity of their respective mandates and operations, there exist a number of areas

where common approaches, joint endeavours and sharing of best practices should be sought.

Recommendation 6

In consultation with FALD, the Field Service Staff Union (FSSU) and OHRM, and after reviewing practices of other United Nations organizations, the Secretary-General should propose a number of measures to alleviate the strain of field service life on individual staff members and their families. Such measures could include the appointment of qualified stress counsellors in all peace operations (see paragraphs 73 to 77).

H. While much thinking has already been carried out among Member States, as well as within the administration and among staff members regarding the reform of the Field Service in general and the issues outlined above in particular, little actual progress has been accomplished, as other urgent issues often take precedence and as the Secretariat has been unable to devote adequate resources to this task.

Recommendation 7

In order to implement recommendations 1 to 6, the Secretary-General should devote adequate resources (two professionals on a full-time basis for 18 months in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations) to the reform of the Field Service (see paragraphs 36 and 37).

INTRODUCTION

1. The General Assembly endorsed the establishment of a Field Service category of staff in November 1949 [resolution 297 (IV)]. It provided for the formation of a cadre of some 300 staff with field experience and the necessary technical background to provide various support services in such areas as transportation, communications and security to United Nations peacekeeping and related field operations. In the five decades since the inception of the Field Service, the Organization's needs in terms of civilian staffing for peacekeeping operations (PKOs) have changed considerably, both in numbers and in substance. While earlier operations emphasized mainly military operations, over the last fifteen years the Organization has been called upon to field a much wider range of civilian staff performing substantive work as well as administrative and technical support functions.

2. The Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) noted that these changes in PKOs have not been matched by corresponding changes in the composition and functions of the Field Service. Previous JIU reports addressed various issues related to PKOs,[1] but not the specific question of the Field Service. The Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations issued in August 2000 described the Field Service category as "obsolete", and called for an urgent revision of the Field Service's composition and raison d'être.[2] The Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (hereafter referred to as "the Special Committee") has also encouraged the reform of the Field Service category of personnel.[3] Responding to the Panel, the Secretary-General indicated that proposals would be presented to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session in this regard, although none had yet been issued at the time of the drafting of this report.[4]

3. This report, therefore, examines the extent to which the Field Service category of personnel, in its present composition, meets the needs of PKOs, and the question of whether and how the Field Service can be restructured and reformed to serve these operations more effectively. In doing so, it addresses the issues of the size, occupational focus and permeability of the category, as well as measures which could be taken to streamline its management and simplify its administration. Finally, the report reviews the effect in human terms of the frequent mobility and repeated exposure of Field Service Officers to hardship situations and steps that can be taken to alleviate this toll.

4. Although staff members at the General Service (GS) level assigned from Headquarters or other offices to established missions are temporarily converted into the Field Service category, where they are identified by the letters FSL (Field Service Level) as distinct from the FSOs, this report focuses exclusively on the latter. General issues relating to the staffing of PKOs as well as to the reform of human resources management will nevertheless also be addressed to the extent that they have a bearing on the present or future of the Field Service.

5. In the course of the preparation of this report, the Inspector met with representatives of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and in particular with officials in the Field Administration and Logistics Division, who provided him with extensive documentation and information. Close contacts were kept at all times with the Department, which has embarked on its own review of the Field Service, in order to exchange views and information and avoid duplications. Additional material and opinions were gathered from the Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs) of present PKOs as well as from representatives of the Field Service Staff Union by way of detailed questionnaires and

[1] See in particular (JIU/REP/93/6) Staffing of the United Nations peace-keeping and related missions; (JIU/REP/95/4) Report on sharing responsibilities in peace-keeping: the United Nations and Regional organizations; (JIU/REP/95/6), Investigation of the relationship between humanitarian assistance and peace-keeping operations; and (JIU/REP/95/11) Military component of United Nations peace-keeping operations.

[2] Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (A/55/305, S/2000/809), 21 August 2000, paras. 139-140.

[3] Comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects, Report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (A/C.4/55/6), 4 December 2000, para. 30.

[4] Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (A/55/502), 20 October 2000, para. 107.

interviews in the field. Information was also sought on policies and practices of other United Nations system organizations dealing with emergency situations and with a large civilian presence in the field, such as UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP. The Inspector wishes to express his appreciation to all those who assisted him so willingly in the preparation of this report.

I. MEETING THE NEEDS OF NEW PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

A. New challenges in the staffing of PKOs

6. In 1996, the Personnel Management Support Service (PMSS) of FALD prepared a proposal for a Global Civilian Staffing Strategy for Field Operations, which noted that the degree of success that peacekeeping and related field operations enjoyed was directly, though not exclusively, dependent upon the calibre of human resources provided through the staffing process. An internal task force was convened in the spring of 2001 by DPKO in an effort to complete, update and finalize the global staffing strategy, in the light of the recommendations of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations. The Task Force underlined that the speed in deployment had become a critical factor in the success of such missions. The success of the staffing strategy, it concluded, would hinge on ensuring that enough of the right people were in the right place at the right time.

7. The Special Committee has urged the Secretariat to work towards the goal of being able to deploy peacekeeping operations within 30 days and to deploy complex PKOs within 90 days after the adoption of the mandate.[5] Next to the rapidity of deployment required by Member States, the exponential growth in the need for substantive staff is certainly the most significant challenge facing PKOs at the moment. However, the types of logistical and administrative support required in PKOs have also changed significantly and have become much more complex than in the past. Communications, for instance, now integrate a great deal of electronic data processing, while fleet managers, a function calling for organizational and managerial skills, are today more in demand than vehicle mechanics. All United Nations officials met by the Inspector concurred that there is a growing need for more specialized skills, proficiency in modern technology and middle management capacity among civilian specialists assigned to the field.

8. In fact, the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations noted the "critical shortfalls in key administrative areas (procurement, finance, budget, personnel) and in logistics support areas (contract managers, engineers, information systems analysts, logistics planners) which "plagued United Nations peace operations throughout the 1990s".[6] The Panel also stressed that the unique and specific nature of the Organization's administrative rules, regulations and internal procedures precluded new recruits from taking on these administrative and logistics functions without a substantial amount of training. In addition, some of these functions, critical to the effective administration of PKO, (such as contract managers, procurement officers, finance officers and other officers with financial certifying authority) cannot normally be outsourced.[7]

9. A working group constituted of representatives of DPKO and FSSU (hereafter referred to as the Working Group) met in 2000 and issued a brief report on a restructured Field Service category. The report pointed out that some 30 per cent of posts in the core team of any United Nations mission are normally linked to administrative functions, and that major difficulties persist in identifying and securing the release of qualified administrative staff. It also noted that the requirement for pre-certification to perform certain functions restricts further the pool of eligible candidates. The report stressed the need for a "truly mobile core of professional staff that possess specialized knowledge in the establishment, operation and closure of field missions".[8]

10. In order to begin assessing whether the present composition of the Field Service category meets at least some of these pressing needs, in terms of occupations, skills and mobility, and whether it can constitute the "core of professional staff" envisaged by the Working

[5] Comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects, Report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (A/C.4/55/6), 4 December 2000.

[6] Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (A/55/305, S/2000/809), 21 August 2000, para. 136.

[7] Report by the Secretary-General on the implementation of the recommendations of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations and the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (A/55/977), 1 June 2001.

[8] Resourcefulness, mobility, versatility, professionalism: the Working Group report on a restructured Field Service category, March 2000.

Group, it is useful to provide first a brief statistical description of the category.

B. A profile of the Field Service category today

11. The Field Service was originally intended to comprise a maximum of 300 individuals providing the following services: provision of land transport, maintenance of radio communications, security of premises, members of missions, supplies and records, and maintenance of order during meetings, hearings and investigations.[9] It was later enlarged to include other occupational groups including secretaries, electricians and a number of general administration functional titles. In addition, although it was initially to be restricted to physically fit single men between the ages of 22 and 30, the category soon expanded to include both men and women, for whom marital restrictions were removed.[10]

12. As at the end of 2000, the 460 FSOs made up some 13 per cent only of the 3,500 international civilian staff employed in United Nations PKOs.[11] However, they constituted the sole category of staff exclusively oriented to the field and to peace operations.

Table 1: Distribution of FSOs by age group
(as at 31 December 2000)

	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59
No.	0	56	220	184
%	0	12.2	47.8	40

Source: Statistics provided by FALD/PMSS.

13. At the end of 2000, the average age of FSOs was 47. It should also be noted that 46 per cent of FSOs are due to retire during the next ten years. Retirements will mostly affect FSOs at the FS7 level (73 per cent of them will retire in the next decade) and FS6 level (70 per cent). Over two thirds of FSOs are presently employed at the FS4 or FS5 levels. FSOs at levels FS1 to FS5 are equivalent to staff in the General Service category, while those at FS6 are equivalent to professional staff at P3 level and at FS7 to professional staff at P4 level.

Table 2: Distribution of FSOs by grade
(as at 31 December 2001)

	FS-2	FS-3	FS-4	FS-5	FS-6	FS-7	Total
No.	1	52	181	139	72	15	460
%	0.3	11.3	39.3	30.2	15.6	3.3	100

Source: Statistics provided by FALD/PMSS.

14. Women make up only 15 per cent of FSOs.[12] This situation derives mainly from the origin of the Field Service and the traditional recruitment procedures for staff in this category. Candidates who, in the early years of peacekeeping fulfilled the requirement contained in the General Assembly resolution, were mainly military personnel (male) drawn from the leading troop-contributing countries. No specific effort ever seems to have been made in recent years to redress this imbalance, and work/life issues (see chapter IV) continue to make it difficult for women to join the ranks of the Field Service.

15. The Field Service is not subject to a rule of equitable geographical distribution and its national composition is equally slanted, with some 60 per cent of FSOs coming from 15 countries only.

16. It should be noted that the Special Committee has stressed the increasing need for the participation of female personnel, on a broad geographical basis, in all aspects of peacekeeping operations, and the need to maintain equitable geographical distribution and gender balance for civilian specialists in particular.[13]

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[9] United Nations Field Service, *Official Records of the General Assembly: Fourth Session, Supplement No. 13* (A/959), 1949, annex I.

[10] Global civilian staffing strategy for field operations: a proposal, PMSS, FALD, 8 March 1996.

[11] Statistical data and charts, United Nations Nations peacekeeping from 1991 to 2000, United Nations Nations/Department of Public Information. By June 2001 (according to statistics provided by FALD/PMSS), there were 447 FSOs.

[12] Statistical data and charts, United Nations Nations peacekeeping from 1991 to 2000, UN/DPI.

[13] Comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects, Reports of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (A/54/839), 20 March 2000, para. 78 and A/C.4/55/6 of 4 December 2000, para. 30.

17. Although the Field Service was conceived to include individuals serving on a short-term basis (the term of service was from one to three years), it eventually developed into a career service for many of them. Thus, in July 2001, 344 FSOs (or 77 per cent) held fixed-term appointments and 103 (or 23 per cent) held permanent appointments.

18. There are eight major occupational groups employing FSOs, as described in table 3, but these groups cover more than 50 different functional titles. While the percentage of FSOs involved in administrative areas has been increasing steadily, over one third is still engaged in purely technical trades such as vehicle mechanics or electrical support.

19. Owing to the original conception of the Field Service, its Officers do not, in general, possess university degrees, but rather technical diplomas and certificates. In addition, a recruitment freeze has been in effect for FSOs since 1993 which has prevented the rejuvenation of the category and the acquisition of

20. indispensable up-to-date skills in such rapidly evolving fields as elecommunications, logistics and information management.[14]

Table 3: Distribution of FSOs among occupational groups as at mid-2000

	NUMBER	%
Building Management Service	1	0.2
Electricians	26	5.7
General Administration	165	35.9
Generator Mechanics	2	0.4
Radio Operators	34	7.4
Radio Technicians	102	22.2
Security Officers	32	6.9
Vehicle Mechanics	98	21.3
TOTAL	**460**	**100%**

Source: Statistics provided by FALD/PMSS.

[14] It should be noted, however, that although there is a theoretical freeze on the formal recruitment of FSOs, a small number of FSL staff can be converted to FSOs after completing four years as FSL under the 300 series staff rules.

II. REFORMING THE FIELD SERVICE: AN EMERGING CONSENSUS

A. A category of personnel with much needed assets

20. The Panel on United Nations Peace Operations stated that the Field Service's composition no longer matched any or many of the administrative and logistics support needs of the newer generation of operations–as appears to be confirmed by the above description of an ageing, little diversified workforce, with technical skills that may be outdated–and the Panel called for its urgent revision. In 1997, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted a management audit of FSOs and recommended that no new FSO be recruited and that those on board be encouraged to leave through early retirement or voluntary separation.[15] While concurring with many of the concerns expressed by OIOS in terms of budgetary inefficiencies and administrative anomalies, most officials consulted in the preparation of this report caution that the large pool of experience, skills and knowledge residing in the Field Service should be retained. They pointed out that currently, more than ever, the Organization needed a separate "travelling" category of personnel with knowledge of the United Nations, for whom mobility was the norm rather than the exception.

21. As noted in chapter I, the Organization is now required to deploy traditional peacekeeping operations fully within 30 days of the adoption of a Security Council resolution, and within 90 days in the case of complex peacekeeping operations. The Secretary-General has reported on the various efforts undertaken by the Secretariat to comply with this requirement.[16] These efforts include, in particular, work on the preparation of a new global strategy for civilian staffing, with delegation of additional recruitment authority to field missions, standby arrangements and the launch of the Galaxy Project. The latter is intended to speed up and standardize the process of recruiting civilian personnel for peacekeeping operations in general. The Project covers the design, development, implementation and maintenance of a web-enabled application software system that will re-engineer the full range of United Nations staff recruitment and selection methods. DPKO is in partnership with OHRM in this project, for which the Special Committee has stated its support.[17]

22. No software or computerized roster, however, can replace the ready availability and unique flexibility of a group of experienced and highly mobile individuals. The very purpose of the Field Service is its capacity to relocate at any time to any other duty station, and it remains the only genuinely mobile category of staff in the United Nations. Because they are required to be available for immediate deployment and to accept the conditions on the ground, one of the main assets of FSOs is precisely their ability to deploy at very short notice. The time required for the deployment of FSOs normally varies between two days and three weeks, depending mostly on the availability of adequate transportation facilities. An advance party consisting of FSOs and others most often spearheads new missions. It should be noted, however, that this rapidity of deployment and comparative advantage may be eroding with the ageing of the category and the reluctance of some FSOs, for family reasons, to leave at very short notice.

23. The benefits of the Field Service are not limited to its members' ability to deploy rapidly. CAOs consulted for this report all concur that the adaptability, versatility, resourcefulness and ability of FSOs to work in hardship and hazardous conditions are also precious assets, especially at the start of missions or during their unexpected expansion. As noted in the proposal for a Global Civilian Staffing Strategy prepared by FALD in 1996, the experience of its members extends beyond mere familiarity with United Nations practices and procedures to the

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[15] OIOS, Management Audit of the United Nations Field Service Officers (AM97/72/3).

[16] Report by the Secretary-General on the implementation of the recommendations of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations and the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (A/55/977), 1 June 2001.

[17] Comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects, Report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (A/55/1024), 31 July 2001, para. 72.

application of these practices and procedures in the field mission context.

24. In addition, their long-term service has built in them a loyalty and commitment to the Organization and its principles which may not always be found in short-term mission appointees. The Panel on Peace Operations noted the need to "rethink the historically prevailing view of peacekeeping as a temporary aberration rather than a core function of the United Nations" and the advantages of retaining the best elements among mission recruits.[18] These comments highlight the usefulness of keeping and developing a lean cadre of career field specialists, who would be supplemented by surge staff as required.

25. The Inspector notes that UNHCR is presently reviewing the possibility of expanding its own Field Service category of personnel. At present, the Field Service in UNHCR is restricted to a highly mobile operational group composed of a small number of radio operators. Like the United Nations, however, the Organization temporarily converts to the Field Service its General Service staff assigned to the field, typically for two years. After the completion of their assignment, these staff members are expected to return to their posts at Headquarters or in other UNHCR established offices. As an increasing number of GS staff has been assigned in recent years to field operations to perform functions in the administrative and financial areas, the Organization has begun discussing whether converting a number of them permanently to the Field Service would not meet some of its pressing staffing needs.

26. In this regard, noting that the civilian staffing strategy being developed by the Secretariat mentions the need to widen sources of recruitment for field specialists to other United Nations agencies, the Joint Inspection Unit has enquired as to the feasibility of establishing a pool of civilian field specialists common to all United Nations organizations dealing with emergency or conflict situations. WFP has indicated that it would be ready to participate in discussions on such a common system, but noted that certain specialized functions would be agency-specific. UNICEF also believes that establishing such a pool would be feasible in principle, although it would pose challenges similar to those related to common services and processes.

27. UNHCR, for its part, does not believe that such a scheme could be viable, as each organization's needs may vary according to the timing and size of the emergency conflict, and the required skills and numbers to be mobilized. It doubts that a resource pool shared by all United Nations organizations would have the capacity to provide a comprehensive emergency response package to mount big operations, and stresses the complex issue of cost allocation among the organizations. Similarly, FALD believes that the core staff of peacekeeping support should remain DPKO-affiliated.

B. Redefining the Field Service

28. On the basis of the considerations outlined above, the Inspector recommends that a separate category of field-oriented staff be retained by the United Nations. These would be part of the core teams envisaged in the new global civilian staffing strategy for the start-up, expansion or liquidation of operations. However, the category will need to be thoroughly reformed to meet the challenges of the new generation of PKOs. This comprehensive restructuring should focus on the size of the Field Service and on its composition in terms of occupations and skills, on conditions of service for FSOs, as well as on how the category is administered and relates to the other categories of United Nations personnel.

29. The size of the group (first estimates point to a group of three to four hundred individuals) will depend on the definition of the level and range of functions that it will cover, and on the templates for the staffing of missions which DPKO is presently updating and refining. The core teams mentioned above would mostly be composed of highly mobile and experienced middle-level managers, with strong supervisory and training skills. FSOs would form the administrative and logistic backbone of these teams, and would focus on those occupational groups that provide the managerial and

[18] Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (A/55/305), 21 August 2000, para. 133.

operational capacity of field operations (logistics, procurement, finance, personnel, etc.).

30. There appears to be a consensus that the teams would probably include few internationally-recruited support staff, especially in the technical and trades-related fields. More cost-effective alternatives present themselves in many duty stations (but not all), in the form of contracts for services, international contractual personnel, local labour market and/or United Nations Volunteers. Functions that can often be filled locally include electrical and electronic data-processing support, mechanics, vehicle maintenance, transport and, to some extent, engineering and communications. In fact, at a number of duty stations, these functions are already performed by local staff or through local contractors, at a fraction of the cost of filling these positions with FSOs. There is also general agreement, however, that a need would remain for FSO staff in some administrative and logistical support functions, and that local staff/contractors should only be used to the extent that effective control is maintained. The presence of FSOs in supervisory functions will, therefore, be required in most cases. This presence will also ensure continuity and compliance with organizational standards.

31. It is interesting to note, in this regard, the somewhat diverging practices in other United Nations organizations. UNICEF indicates, for example, that support functions in the field are handled almost exclusively by local staff, and that GS staff are recruited internationally only in the very few cases where it may not be feasible to obtain the services of local staff. WFP, on the other hand, states that during the initial set-up of emergency operations, and in certain countries where international office support is essential, one or two international General Service posts (international secretary-GS5, international administrative assistant-GS6, international programme assistant-GS6) are normally included in its international teams or "task forces". As indicated above, UNHCR does not recruit General Service staff on an international basis for field missions, but deploys currently employed senior GS staff for support functions in the areas of administration and finance. However, it may change its policy in the near future.

32. Although the Field Service category was established to carry out a variety of technical functions within peacekeeping operations, over the years, and as the United Nations has become involved in large and complex operations, FSOs have often been transferred across functions without adequate preparation, training, or assessment. In addition, while most FSOs are technically proficient, there is a wide consensus among FSO staff and their supervisors regarding the urgent need to develop the managerial and communications skills of the former. At the same time, a number of specialized technical skills, in particular in logistics, also seems to be lacking in the category.

33. The Organization has long neglected the development of its field-based staff. Training for the Field Service has so far been limited to corporate training programmes offered to all staff serving at Headquarters or in large missions in the field (supervisory skills, collaborative negotiations, etc). Courses have also been offered in technical or specialized areas (such as information technology, communications, transport or procurement). Most duty stations to which FSOs are assigned do not offer adequate local training facilities such as universities. OIOS recommended that FALD prepare a resource estimate for the development of a training programme specifically designed to improve the FSO skills mix.[19] However, no such training module has been put in place, mainly due to the lack of resources in FALD.

34. The Inspector, therefore, reiterates the need to fully develop a specific training programme for Field Service staff, which could be a combination of in-house and external training, including correspondence courses, and would not only aim to develop the managerial and supervisory skills required of members of the core teams but also to ensure the up-to-date technical and operational competency of FSOs. This programme could be developed by the Civilian Training Section of FALD, if established, in consultation and cooperation with

[19] OIOS, Management Audit of the United Nations Field Service Officers (AM97/72/3).

the United Nations Staff College.[20]

35. Such a comprehensive programme needs to be based on a full inventory of the skills, experience and competencies presently available in the category. PMSS has recently started reviewing the files of FSOs with a view to creating profiles or fact sheets for them, and is in the process of creating and sending a new follow-up questionnaire to all FSOs in order to obtain more up-to-date information on their background, including any training or formal education they have obtained since joining the Field Service, as well as their personal career aspirations. The assessment of training and developmental needs, however, cannot precede fundamental decisions to be taken on the future of the Field Service.

36. In recent years, in the absence of such decisions and of adequate resources, FALD has not been able to progress decisively and address the pressing needs of the category in a systematic manner. Owing to urgent demands related to the launch and expansion of large peace missions in the last two years, reform of the Field Service appears to have been put on hold. Work on this issue is only conducted by officials in their "spare time", when other duties permit it. Priority should now be given to the preparation of a comprehensive and detailed package of proposals with regard to the future composition, in terms of numbers and functions, of the Field Service. If adequate resources are identified and earmarked full-time by the Department for this purpose, these proposals, which would build on the extensive work already undertaken by FALD and FSSU on the issue, could probably be presented to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session.

37. It must be foreseen that once decisions are taken with regard to the future composition of the Field Service, the inventory of skills and competencies will show that a number of FSOs, particularly those specializing in technical areas but even among those who are eligible for conversion to the Professional category under present rules, will not meet the newly-defined requirements of the Field Service. Some staff will need to be re-deployed to other suitable positions in the Secretariat or other United Nations agencies, others phased out through early retirement, attrition and/or compensation. Therefore, a working group with representatives of DPKO, OHRM and FSSU should be established to propose to the Secretary-General criteria and modalities for retention and integration of staff in the new Field Service and for the redeployment and phasing out of others. Such criteria should include, inter alia, academic and professional training, record of performance and proven ability to manage and supervise, as well as to communicate effectively. This work will also require that appropriate resources be devoted to it on a full-time basis. The Secretariat's investment in the process would certainly yield considerable benefits if it leads to a rejuvenated, re-energized workforce fully tailored to the new peace operations.

[20] See Programme-budget implications of draft resolution A/C.4/55/L. 23 (document A/C.5/55/46/add.1), paragraphs 5.45 to 5.62, 8 August 2001.

III. STREAMLINING THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE FIELD SERVICE

A. Abolishing the concept of parent duty station and simplifying entitlements

38. Reforming the Field Service will also entail an overhaul of the way in which it is administered. It has been noted that the Field Service is at the moment the most expensive source of personnel for the Organization.[21] Costs associated with FSOs are linked to the administrative and budgetary set-up for the category and, in particular, to the parent duty station system and related entitlements. FSOs from the FS1 to FS5 levels receive base salaries equivalent to GS staff, and FSOs at levels FS6 and FS7 receive salaries equivalent to P3s and P4s respectively. All FSOs, however, are entitled to education grant, home leave and other benefits offered to internationally recruited staff.

39. The parent duty station concept, according to which FSOs are recruited for posts appearing in the budget of five "established missions"[22] to which they remain administratively attached even when on assignment (known as "tour of duty") to "special missions", was partly based on the need to provide continuity to families. As such, it has contributed in some measure to the welfare of staff members while providing financial incentives for them to go on assignment to special missions. A majority of officials consulted for this report, however, now sees the system as inefficient and costly and is calling for its complete overhaul.

40. The present system has in fact created a sort of budgetary fiction, as established missions determine their budgets not solely on the basis of actual operational needs, but on the need to create a "holding center"for FSOs between assignments. In its 1997 audit, OIOS recommended that this practice be stopped, as it is not an efficient method for allocating resources.[23] The audit noted that neither the parent missions nor FALD planned for the re-absorption of FSOs when they returned to their parent mission. The system has also allowed the "over-subscription" of FSOs. Thus, there were 447 FSOs in mid-2001, but only 280 established posts, the difference being budgeted under special missions.

Table 4: Breakdown of FSOs by location as at July 2001

	Number of FSOs	Budgeted FSO posts
"ESTABLISHED MISSIONS", of which:	**203**	**280**
UNTSO		108
UNMOGIP		26
UNFICYP		29
UNIFIL		91
UNDOF		26
"SPECIAL MISSIONS"	**231**	
United Nations Headquarters	8	
Other offices	5	
TOTAL	**447**	

Source: Statistics provided by FALD/PMSS, Programme Budget for the biennium 2000-2001 (which includes the budgets for UNTSO and UNMOGIP, which are funded from the regular budget of the United Nations) and budgets for UNFICYP, UNIFIL and of UNDOF from 1 July 2001 to 30 June 2002.

41. For FSOs working in their parent mission, salary costs and all other entitlements and allowances are charged against the authorized posts of those missions. For FSOs on tour of duty, they are charged against the authorized posts of the missions to which they are reassigned, although the salaries and all allowances and entitlements (except for Mission Subsistence Allowance or MSA) are calculated at the rate of their parent duty station. Compounding the budgetary confusion is the fact, mentioned in the introduction to this report, that staff members at the General Service level

[21] Global civilian staffing strategy for field operations: a proposal, PMSS, FALD, 8 March 1996.

[22] The five "established missions" are: United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO); United Nations Military Observer Group on India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP); United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP); Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and United Nations Disengagement Force (UNDOF).

[23] OIOS, Management Audit of the United Nations Field Service Officers (AM97/72/3).

assigned to established missions are temporarily converted into the Field Service category (but are identified through the letters FSL–Field Service Level–as distinct from the FSOs). Staff members at the GS level who are assigned to special missions remain attached to that category and are identified as such.

42. The parent duty station system also adds to the complexity and inefficiency of the administration of FSOs. For example, delays in the processing of staff entitlements are often the result of tripartite communications between the special mission where the FSO is on tour of duty, the parent mission and FALD/PMSS at Headquarters.

43. The Inspector believes, therefore, that there is an urgent need for the whole concept of the parent duty station to be reviewed and, probably, abolished. He notes that the concept is unique to the United Nations (other agencies with a large presence of staff in the field do not have "parent duty stations" as such) and to the Field Service in particular. It appears to be no longer justified or efficient. In addition, while it was conceived to provide an element of stability for staff members and their families, conditions in established missions today are not necessarily conducive to the welfare of families (see chapter IV). Instead of being arbitrarily attached to an established mission, therefore, all FSOs should share a single base, which would in all logic be DPKO at Headquarters. It should be noted in this regard that the Field Service was originally envisaged to be "stationed at Headquarters for training".[24]

44. Should established missions no longer serve as a "reserve" for FSOs, and should their budgets only include in the future the exact number of FSO posts actually required by these missions, as is the case for special missions, it may also be simpler, and provide for more budgetary clarity, to stop identifying Field Service posts separately in mission budgets. They could be identified instead as Professional or GS posts, to which FS staff would be assigned according to their grade and functions. There would remain a need for a number of supplementary posts, probably between 10 to 20 per cent of the total, to be budgeted at Headquarters as a reserve for FSOs. This "reserve" could also be used to assign field specialists "on loan" to other agencies with large field operations.

45. The abolition of the parent duty station would also allow the Organization to align FSO entitlements with those of other staff members, whether in the Professional or GS categories, who are assigned temporarily to the field. The Secretariat should prepare a cost-benefit analysis of the potential financial impact of basing all FSOs at Headquarters instead of at parent duty stations. This analysis would probably reveal substantial gains for the Organization. At the same time, recognition must be given to the higher requirements placed on the Field Service in terms of mobility and exposure to hardship. Such recognition could be given in the form of an extension of the present mobility and hardship matrix, so as to take into account the possibility that FSOs may move more than a dozen times during the course of their career and should be compensated accordingly.[25]

46. FALD also stresses the administrative burden placed on it by the processing of entitlements linked to the frequent travel of FSOs and their dependants. Consideration could be given in field missions to piloting a system for the monetization of official travel similar to the one recently adopted by United Nations Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Travel of UNDP staff members and their recognized dependents on appointment, reassignment, home leave in conjunction with reassignment and repatriation on separation, has been monetized and is arranged through a cash payment. Staff members are responsible for making their own travel arrangements. It is no longer necessary to issue a travel authorization (PT.8) or to submit a travel expense claim (F.10).[26] The issue was raised by FSSU at the last Staff Management Coordination Committee meeting (SMCC-XXV) and it was decided that

[24] United Nations Field Service, *Official Records of the General Assembly: Fourth Session, Supplement No. 13* (A/959), 1949, annex 1.

[25] At the moment, amounts paid for the Mobility and Hardship Allowance in accordance with ST/AI/2000/2 of 10 March 2000 do not increase after the fifth assignment.

[26] Expatriate entitlement reforms: monetization of official travel and pilot relocation grant (UNDP/ADM/01/4), 19 January 2001.

once the experience of UNDP had been assessed, the viability and desirability of extending it to field missions would be studied, as well as the possibility of extending lump-sum options to other elements.

B. Adopting and implementing a clear policy for rotation and mobility

47. An essential corollary of this reform and of the abolition of parent duty stations would be the adoption and implementation of a clear policy for the rotation and mobility of FSOs. The Inspector was informed that the average length of assignment for FSOs to a special mission is approximately one year and a half. However, the length and frequency of assignments vary considerably among FSOs.

48. A rotation policy was adopted and promulgated by FALD in 1998. The policy recognizes that mobility among field missions is a unique and fundamental characteristic of the Field Service category. Accordingly, it calls for FSOs to be normally assigned to an established mission for four years of active service, and to a special mission for two years. On return from tour of duty, Field Service staff would be expected to serve at least 18 months at their parent duty station before they become eligible for another special mission. No staff member should theoretically remain more than four years on a continued tour of duty.

49. FALD states that it has tried to fully implement the rotation policy, taking into account the operational requirements of ongoing missions and hardship conditions of special missions. However, a majority of officials consulted for the report believes that the policy has not been applied consistently and that the rotation system still lacks transparency. FSSU, for its part, believes that the rotation policy, which was developed in consultation with the Union, has never been properly implemented.

50. It appears that a number of FSOs tend to avoid rotation and have served in established missions a substantial number of years in excess of four.[27] Other FSOs, on the contrary, have been continually employed in special missions, sometimes for as long as six years, either voluntarily (because of the financial advantages linked to such assignments) or because certain specialized skills are in high demand in special missions. The recent deployment of large field missions (in particular United Nations Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) and United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK)) has made it particularly difficult to strictly implement the policy, while a lack of resources has prevented FALD from developing a meaningful plan for rotation and career development of FSOs. Recent requests by DPKO for resources to establish a Human Resources Management and Development Section in PMSS, if accepted by the United Nations General Assembly, could assist the Department in managing the careers of field staff more systematically.[28]

51. If the parent duty station system is abolished, a whole new rotation and mobility policy should be developed and firmly applied. It should allow FSOs to rotate from their base at Headquarters between assignments to different types of missions. Past differentiation between "established" and "special" missions has proved misleading, as some of the "established" missions have or can become unsuitable for long assignments, while newer missions can take place in safer and more "family-friendly" environments. Therefore, as criteria developed by the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) distinguish hardship duty stations from easier ones, FSOs should alternate, to the extent possible, between the two. Some would also be expected to serve for periods of time in DPKO at Headquarters, where their field experience could be of great value.

52. In this regard, it may be useful to review the practices and policies of other United Nations organizations with a large presence in the field. UNICEF, for example, indicates that rotation among its staff is carried out annually with due regard to the mobility and hardship classification of duty stations, and to avoid the

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[27] Normally, Field Service Officers are required to accept assignments to any duty station. However, if plausible reasons (family problems, health conditions, etc.) are given, FALD does not force the movement.

[28] See Programme-budget implications of draft resolution A/C.4/55/L. 23, document A/C.5/55/46/add.1, paragraphs 5.45 to 5.62, 8 August 2001.

same set of people having to serve continuously in any one type of duty station including headquarters. Tours of duty at emergency duty stations may be less than two years due to prevailing conditions at the duty station. International staff members who are subject to rotation are expected to serve no more than two full tours of duty in the same location. Mobility is rewarded financially by a mobility and hardship allowance, hazard pay and a special operations living allowance.

53. Almost all internationally recruited staff members at UNHCR are also subject to that Organization's rotation policy and a system of standard assignment lengths (SAL). SALs are determined based on the level of hardship of the duty station, as categorized by ICSC. SAL is normally two years for "D" and "E" duty stations, three years for "B" and "C", and four years for "A" and "H" duty stations. Mobility is rewarded through payment of the mobility and hardship allowance as well as through other benefits in terms of more frequent travel on home leave, family visits and education grant.

C. Harmonizing the administration of the Field Service with other categories of personnel

54. To the extent possible, rules and procedures governing the administration of FSOs should be harmonized with those of other categories of personnel. While they are subject to the same 100 series staff rules and regulations as regular GS and Professional staff, FSOs are administered differently with regard to important matters such as recruitment, promotions or career development. Their specificity has generated a heavy administrative burden for DPKO, which has by necessity focused on labour-intensive processing functions to the detriment of more substantive or value-added tasks.

55. The basic document of reference for the administration of the Field Service is ST/AFS/SGB/87/Rev.2 of 7 March 1950, which has never been superseded and which sets out the functions and responsibilities of the Field Service. This document is obviously obsolete, as it does not reflect changes that have occurred over the last decades. Responsibility for the administration and management of the Field Service was moved from the Department of Administration and Management to DPKO in 1993. In fact, since 1994, DPKO has authority in respect of all mission appointees and staff members serving on mission detail.[29] Within the Field Administration and Logistics Division of DPKO, PMSS is primarily responsible for managing the Field Service. A new bulletin should therefore be issued once fundamental decisions are made on the future of the Field Service.[30]

56. This bulletin should reflect, in particular, a new distribution of responsibilities, within Headquarters and between Headquarters and missions, for the administration of the Field Service. In its questionnaire sent to all current peace operations, JIU enquired as to whether CAOs believed that the level of authority delegated from FALD/PMSS to them for the administration of FSOs was sufficient, and also asked for the reasons for the frequent delays in the processing of entitlements. Most respondents found this delegation insufficient, and stated that this, as well as inadequate staffing of FALD at Headquarters, accounted for the delays. This view was shared by FSSU. It was stressed, in particular, that personnel administration issues, such as allowances and benefits (home leave, education grant, salary advances, special post allowances, etc.), but also contract extensions and disciplinary and appeals matters should be delegated to field missions, with adequate monitoring from PMSS/FALD, at least to the same extent as they already are for other 100 series staff.

57. Similarly, once the recruitment of FSOs resumes within the framework of a reformed Field Service, the new procedures recently adopted for the recruitment and placement of other staff members should equally be applied to

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[29] See "Administrative issuances on delegation of authority. Note by the Secretary-General" (A/54/257), 18 August 1999.

[30] In its 1997 management audit, OIOS recommended that the Secretary-General's bulletin be amended by FALD in collaboration with OLA. However, no work has been undertaken on this matter pending a comprehensive review of the category.

this category of personnel.[31] In particular, while taking into account the specificity of the Field Service, and especially its mobility imperative, criteria for recruitment or promotion to the FS6 and FS7 levels should be more closely aligned with those used for recruitment to Professional posts. FALD has indicated that it is presently working closely with OHRM in order to ensure that its field policies and procedures are compatible with those applicable to GS and Professional staff at Headquarters, whilst maintaining the flexibility required by DPKO to expediently assign staff.

58. As for promotion, the annual review system currently used for the Field Service should be immediately replaced by a vacancy management system akin to that used for other categories of personnel in the Secretariat. Under the current system, FSOs initiate the procedure by submitting a statement indicating why they merit promotion based on such considerations as seniority and performance at a higher level. There is no recourse opportunity upon the completion of the promotion review as such recourse was abolished in consultation with staff representatives when the current format for promotion of Field Service staff was established.[32] This system is widely considered to lack transparency and impartiality, to be inordinately time-consuming and outdated, and to be excessively based on seniority. Promotion review panels must evaluate every FSO with sufficient seniority, irrespective of whether vacancies exist. As a result, expectations are raised every year among FSOs, which often cannot be met.

59. Staff at the FS1 to FS5 levels can be promoted to the Professional category through the competitive examination, although none have ever been. As figures are not available regarding the number of FSOs who may have sat for the examination, it is difficult to determine whether this is an indication that incentives are insufficient for FSOs to seek such promotions, or rather that most of them do not match the requirements for professional posts. As for staff at the FS6 or FS7 levels, they can be converted to the P3 or P4 levels respectively, but only on posts in established missions. After having served 10 years at the Professional level following conversion, they can be considered for any professional post.[33] A total of seven FS staff members have been promoted to the professional category in accordance with these provisions.

60. Abolishing specific Field Service posts and replacing them with either Professional or General Service posts, and harmonizing criteria and procedures for the recruitment, placement and promotion of Field Service staff with those of the Professional and General Service categories, would remove artificial barriers and allow easier movements between these various categories. Under such conditions, staff members at the FS6 or FS7 levels should be allowed, after a number of years of service to be determined, to apply for any professional post for which they are qualified. The Field Service would thus do away with the "glass ceiling" which has in effect constrained the careers of its members with the best performances.

61. Generally, and as noted in chapter II, efforts must be undertaken to develop a genuine career development and performance management system for FSOs. The scarcity of posts for FSOs has seriously limited the possibility of their career development, and FSSU has long complained of the lack of clear career progression for staff in the field. It can be noted in this regard that the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations has stressed the need for the Organization to better manage the careers of all civilian staff in peacekeeping operations.[34]

62. Promotions and career development must be rooted in a solid performance appraisal system. At the moment, the Performance Appraisal System (PAS) is used in established

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[31] See Human resources management reform (A/55/253), 1 August 2000 and resolution A/RES/55/258 of June 2001.

[32] These procedures are in accordance with guidelines established by OHRM, and FALD is currently awaiting the promulgation of these guidelines in the form of an administrative instruction.

[33] Movement of staff from the Field Service category to the Professional category (ST/AI/360/Rev.1), 15 November 1993.

[34] Comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects, Report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (A/55/1024), 31 July 2001.

missions only, while Performance Evaluation Reports (PER) continue to be used in special missions. For assignments shorter than six months, supervisors are required to write special reports. Most CAOs believe that the current PAS should be reviewed and simplified. Several note that the current form does not reflect the elements that should be part of a modern performance evaluation approach, and that it is not geared to reflect the needs and operational activities of the missions. In particular, the performance system does not identify the management abilities of the staff. Finally, it does not take into account the highly mobile nature of the category. FALD has informed the Inspector that it is currently in the final stage of developing a new system for the appraisal of staff in the field, which is more user-friendly, requires less writing and directly addresses the skills, experience and behavioural assessment needs which are required in field operations. The appraisal, which will be completed online and will provide FALD with instant access to updated performance data, also aims to build into the performance appraisal organizational competencies, staff development plans and mobility.

V. THE HUMAN DIMENSION

63. While advocating the adoption and implementation of a clear rotation and mobility policy, the Inspector also stresses the need for FSOs to alternate hardship duty stations and less taxing assignments. This should be done because of humane considerations but also to ensure an adequate level of performance that might not be sustainable for long periods of time in very difficult situations. Although no statistics are available as to the toll taken on the health and performance of FSO staff members by their lifestyle, the Organization acknowledges that it has long failed to take care of FSOs by neglecting not only the career paths of individuals but also their personal preferences and situations.

64. Most CAOs who responded to the JIU questionnaire stated their belief that "field service life" has actually had a serious impact on the mental and physical health of many FSOs, who have been, in their words, "rendered fragile". The following problems were most often mentioned: chronic alcoholism and other substance abuse; increased stress and severe clinical depression; spousal breakdown and high separation or divorce rates; serious medical problems linked to high exposure to tropical diseases. Likewise, FSSU considers that the forced separations of families and the lack of United Nations support for these families may have been a major contributing factor that has led to suicides, divorces and a high rate of substance abuse. The overwhelming majority of FSOs believe that the demands and challenges that they face on mission assignments are not recognized in any tangible way, and that the Organization does not adequately help them to deal with the work-life challenges of many duty stations.[35]

65. Suggestions as to concrete measures which the United Nations could take to ease the strain of hardship and mobility on Field Service staff and their families focus on the need to:

- Better plan assignments and rotation and adhere more strictly to time limits established for service at hardship duty stations, as discussed in chapter III;
- Make provision for staff members to have more frequent interaction with their families;
- Provide families with a stable and secure environment, which includes continuous support from the administration in the absence of the staff member, improved processing of entitlements and efforts to improve general conditions such as access to adequate schooling facilities and spouse employment;
- Provide staff members with stress counselling services.

A. Minimizing separations

66. Many of the complaints expressed by individual staff members, FSSU and CAOs relate to the designation of a duty station as "family" or "non-family". Most consider the present system as unrealistic and unfair. While all staff members assigned to missions are concerned with this issue, FSOs whose whole career is spent in missions are the most directly affected.

67. The designation is made on the basis of operational, security, political, financial and administrative considerations in consultation with the UNSECOORD office, OHRM and DPKO. However, other United Nations agencies may designate as "family", duty stations that are considered as "non-family" by the United Nations, and many staff members employed in special missions break the rules by bringing their families into "non-family" duty stations. UNSECOORD sends periodic reminders, in particular with regard to the missions which are in Security Phase IV, that any staff member in violation of policy should be instructed that their family members should depart from the mission area immediately, and that the staff members who fail to comply with the policy may be subject to disciplinary action. According to FALD, however, the Office of Legal Affairs

[35] Resourcefulness, mobility, versatility, professionalism: the Working Group report on a restructured Field Service category, March 2000.

(OLA) has informed OHRM and DPKO that they cannot impose disciplinary measures on staff who do not comply with the non-family status of certain duty stations.

68. On the other hand, some duty stations (especially established missions) which have long been designated as "family", may no longer be suitable for families for security reasons or because of lack of adequate international schooling. The lack of international schooling facilities is also problematic in the United Nations Logistic Base, Brindisi, Italy, which has nevertheless been designated as a "family" duty station.

69. Some officials suggested to the Inspector that doing away with the designation altogether, and giving to the staff the responsibility to take their own decisions as to bringing in their families would greatly simplify the processing of entitlements linked to the status of duty stations. Others, on the contrary, stated that it would be more prudent to leave the families in their home of record in all circumstances and grant additional Occasional Recuperation Breaks, family visits and/or home leave to the FSOs. This would exempt the Organization from paying for the families' relocation expenses and for such entitlements as education grant travel.

70. The Inspector does not think that the first option is practical but believes that the entire designation process as well as related entitlements should be reviewed within the context of devising a new policy for mobility and rotation. Financial considerations and the streamlining of administrative processes should not necessarily prevail over staff welfare and cannot be the only goals of the new policy, which should also aim at decreasing the total amount of time a staff member spends away from his/her family.

71. In this matter also, a careful review of practices of other United Nations organizations with large numbers of staff in the field could yield elements for improving the present situation. UNICEF informed JIU that it has developed a number of mutually reinforcing policies on Special Operations Approach, Rest and Recuperation, Family Visit, and Medical Evacuation to reduce the risk of repeated exposure of staff to hardship conditions taking too heavy a toll on the health of staff members. These policies seek to enhance management of associated stress through adequate rest and regular family contact.

72. UNHCR has also developed an important package of measures to mitigate the effects of constant rotation while still encouraging mobility. The Organization thus offers a wide range of options to staff members regarding their families and assists them in maintaining two households if necessary. One particularly interesting option offered by that Organization for staff members assigned to non-family duty stations is to base them officially in a neighbouring country, from which they are sent on mission to the actual duty station, with a monthly allowance. In such cases, families can be settled in the more suitable nearby location (which is the official duty station), if they so wish.

B. Maximizing support and managing stress

73. At present, the parent office (in the "established" mission) has the obligation to ensure the residency rights of FSO dependants and provide them with some support during the staff member's tour of duty. However, FSSU asserts that when a staff member is reassigned to a special mission, many families are in fact left to fend for themselves with very little support from the Organization. As a result, many choose to return to their home countries (or places with adequate educational facilities) during the tour of duty of staff members. Thus, it becomes even more apparent that "established missions" are often no longer considered as providing a stable and suitable environment for FSO families.

74. Basing all FSOs at Headquarters in New York, where families could remain permanently if they so wished and where they would be provided with similar rights and facilities to those of other staff members would ease the strain on these families during assignments to hardship duty stations. Such rights would include the right for spouses to be employed. At present, families also tend to leave established missions because in most cases, spouses cannot obtain a work permit to seek employment on the

local labour market. Paradoxically, in a small number of special missions, spouses do have the right to work locally. However, and although missions and other United Nations agencies are normally encouraged to hire qualified spouses of United Nations staff, in the overwhelming majority of cases, spouses of FSOs have not been allowed or able to find employment in the duty station.

75. The Organization has long neglected its responsibility in managing the stress of mission staff in general and FSOs in particular, leaving individuals to cope for themselves in sometimes extremely difficult situations. However, there is growing awareness in OHRM, DKPO and the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator alike of the need to provide professional and qualified assistance to field staff in this regard. The Inspector recommends that a post for welfare officer/stress counsellor be systematically included in the budgets of all peacekeeping operations, and that the practices of other organizations in this area be reviewed.

76. WFP notes that its staff members also often work in difficult duty stations and are exposed to trauma and hardship. Long separations from their families cause feelings of loneliness, depression and sometimes, psychosomatic reactions. For this reason, WFP has developed an extensive Staff Counselling Programme and a Peer Support Network with one hundred trained Peer Support Volunteers worldwide.

77. UNHCR, for its part, has developed a Mental Health Travel Scheme, which is intended to remove staff periodically from a work environment that is extremely stressful, insecure, isolated, or lacking the most basic and essential commodities. It has instituted three types of travel for such exceptional circumstances: MARS (Mandatory Absence for the Relief of Stress), VARI (Voluntary Absence for the Relief of Isolation) and STAR (Supply Travel on Rotation). Travel is to a designated location that offers the necessary degree of rest, security or sufficiency in basic necessities. Staff members who are authorized to travel receive a transportation allowance, living allowance and a specified number of days not charged to annual leave. In cases where staff members have to deal with intense distress, UNHCR calls in a mental health professional to conduct a debriefing.